

What is the EQC?

The Environmental Quality Council (EQC) is a state legislative committee created by the 1971 Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). As outlined in MEPA, the EQC's purpose is to encourage conditions under which people can coexist with nature in "productive harmony". The committee fulfills this purpose by assisting the Legislature in the development of natural resource and environmental policy, by conducting studies on related issues, and by serving in an advisory capacity to the state's natural resource programs.

How can the public become involved?

Members of the public can become involved in the activities of the EQC by attending committee meetings or by contacting committee members or the EQC office. Participation in EQC activities provides interested persons with the opportunity to:

- ▶ access information on the state's natural resources;
- ▶ assist in the oversight of the state's natural resource programs;
- ▶ become involved in the creation and resolution of complex policy issues; and
- ▶ promote governmental accountability.

The EQC deals with some of the most complex and divisive issues in the state. It welcomes your involvement in the discussion and resolution of these issues.

Who is on the EQC?

The EQC has 17 members: 6 state senators; 6 state representatives; 4 members of the public; and 1 nonvoting member who represents the Governor. The EQC is bipartisan. The House, Senate, and public members are all chosen by the majority and minority leaders of each house.

EQC members serve 2-year terms. Members may serve no more than three terms.

Senate Members

Bob Hawks (D-Bozeman)
Christine Kaufmann (D-Helena)
Dan McGee (R-Laurel)
Jim Shockley (R-Victor)
Robert Story (R-Park City)
Dave Wanzenried (D-Missoula), Presiding Officer

House Members

Norma Bixby (D-Lame Deer)
Sue Dickenson (D-Great Falls)
Julie French (D-Scobey)
Carol Lambert (R-Broadus), Vice Presiding Officer
Chas Vincent (R-Libby)
Craig Witte (R-Kalispell)

Public Members

John Brenden (Scobey)
Brian Cebull (Billings)
Diane Conradi (Whitefish)
Doug McRae (Forsyth)

Governor's Representative

Mike Volesky

Who staffs the EQC?

The Legislative Environmental Policy Office (LEPO) staff, under the supervision of the Legislative Environmental Analyst, assists EQC members in completing their duties. Staff responsibilities include conducting studies,

writing reports, reviewing natural resource agency actions, organizing public meetings, drafting legislation, and serving as committee staff to several legislative committees during legislative sessions.

The LEPO staff acts as an impartial and nonpolitical source of information on environmental matters for the EQC, the Legislature, and the public. Current staff are:

Legislative Environmental Analyst . . . Todd Everts
Research Analyst Krista Lee Evans
Research Analyst Joe Kolman
Research Analyst Sonja Nowakowski
Research and Publications Maureen Theisen

2007-08 EQC activities

The EQC decided on what issues to study this interim in several ways: reviewing a study resolution forwarded by the Legislative Council (House Joint Resolution No. 57), discussing a topic of significant interest to EQC members (climate change), and continuing its tradition of establishing an Agency Oversight Subcommittee to communicate with Executive Branch agencies and to complete its statutory duties related to natural resource agency review.

HJR 57—Conservation easements on state trust land

The issues that HJR 57 required the committee to evaluate were initially debated by the 2007 Legislature during the hearings for Senate Bill No. 391. In general, HJR 57 directs the EQC to look at the feasibility and financial and other consequences of establishing **conservation easements on state trust lands**. Although the Montana State Board of Land Commissioners currently has authority in

discreet instances to grant conservation easements on state land, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), the agency that supports the Board, is interested in becoming more nimble in administering trust land properties in order to increase incoming revenue.

Some specific requirements of HJR 57 include evaluating what entities are suitable to hold conservation easements on state lands and how to address the DNRC mandate to maximize trust income while satisfying different public interests and protecting traditional uses, such as grazing, timber cutting, mineral leasing, and recreation. The EQC must report its conclusions and recommendations to the 2009 Legislature.

Climate Change

Because of an increasing interest in **climate change** in Montana and internationally, the EQC agreed to explore the topic to determine if there were problems that could be resolved through legislation and to become sufficiently educated to independently evaluate the recommendations of the Governor's Climate Change Advisory Committee. The EQC heard from several experts on climate change at its September 2007 meeting. For the next several months, the EQC will continue to review emerging information and hear public comment. It will also regularly receive reports on the Energy and Telecommunications Committee's study of carbon sequestration.

Agency Oversight Subcommittee

Although the EQC bases its interim work in large part on the studies assigned by the Legislature, the foundation of its work is its

statutory duties outlined in MEPA and in other sections of the law. As in past interims, the EQC appointed an Agency Oversight Subcommittee to complete many of those duties, especially those regarding the EQC's **agency rule review and program evaluation** responsibilities.

Specifically, the Subcommittee will:

- ▶ conduct rule review for the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, the DNRC, and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks;
- ▶ perform a general review of the EQC's statutory duties;
- ▶ monitor agency compliance and enforcement reporting; and
- ▶ review the Kalispell Pole Site quarterly report and MEPA and natural resource litigation.

Other topics that the EQC has asked to or is statutorily required to keep informed about include:

- ▶ the progress of the water adjudication process initiated by House Bill No. 22 (2005);
- ▶ the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Service's public health tracking project on environmental hazards;
- ▶ leaking underground storage tanks;
- ▶ data collection on the surface water quality of the Tongue River (TRIP Program); and
- ▶ the Clark Fork River litigation.

For more information, please contact the EQC:

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2007-08